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ABSTRACT

The four articles in this issue deal with the teaching of literature. In "Why I Teach Literature," James Inglis suggests that the teaching of literature through the concept of a tripartite dialogue (teacher, students, writer) is necessary for understanding the living and creative aspects of literature. John O'Neill, in "Why I Teach Poetry," discusses his belief that poetry is the most valuable literary form for helping students to develop language arts skills, to widen their interests, to deepen their sensitivity, and to become aware of other people and of their own place among them. James Alison, in "Why I Teach the Novel," explains the private process of novel reading and points out that the novel guarantees certain humane values through its dedication to the uniqueness of the personality and its adventures. In "Why I Teach Drama," Richard Hendry emphasizes the importance of students' enjoying studying drama as literature while they develop both an awareness of the linguistic characteristics peculiar to drama and an appreciation of some of the greatest literary masterpieces. (JM)

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TEACHING ENGLISH

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CONTENTS

ROBERT MILLAR
A Chronicle of His Times
Andrew D. Chirnside, H.M.C.I.

SUMMER INSTITUTE 1973
A Report and a Commentary
Murray McAllan, Principal Teacher of English, Glenrothes High School.

THE TEACHING OF LITERATURE
Why I Teach Literature: James Inglis, Principal Lecturer in English, Jordanhill College of Education.
Why I Teach Poetry: John O'Neill, Assistant Headmaster, St. Mungo's Academy, Glasgow.
Why I Teach the Novel: James N. Alison, Deputy Rector, Hazlehead Academy, Aberdeen.
Why I Teach Drama: Richard Hendry, Principal Teacher of English, Falkirk High School.

THE PROJECT WITH THE SIH NON-CERTIFICATE CLASS
Alastair D. McPhee, English Department, Linwood High School, Johnstone.

C.I.T.E. NOTES

NEWS FROM L.D.C.s

REVIEW OF TEXTBOOKS

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MORAY HOUSE COLLEGE OF EDUCATION
Director: SYDNEY B. SMYTH

HOLYROOD ROAD, EDINBURGH, EH8 8AQ
Telephone 031-556 4415. Extn. 225

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MORAY HOUSE COLLEGE OF EDUCATION
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The Centre was established in September, 1967, with the support of the Scottish Education Department. Besides acting as a clearing house for documents produced in local development centres in Scotland concerned with the teaching of English, it collects information from a wide variety of sources regarding the teaching of English as a mother tongue. Its work covers not only the teaching of English Language and Literature but such aspects of classroom organisation and school administration as have a bearing on the teaching of English.

The Centre issues *Teaching English* thrice yearly, in October, January and May. Besides containing an account of the Centre's activities, this publication will carry articles on the teaching of English and reviews of teachers' books and text-books. Readers are invited to comment on the contents of the magazine and to suggest features which they would find useful. The Editor will be prepared to consider articles for publication.

The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the contributors and do not represent official views, whether of the S.C.C.E., the S.E.D. or C.I.T.E.

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THE TEACHING OF LITERATURE

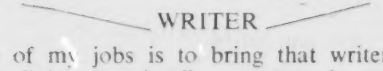
WHY I TEACH LITERATURE

JAMES INGLIS
Principal Lecturer in English, Jordanhill College of Education

If I begin by asking myself what I think I am doing, it may help to make clear why I am doing it.

I am certainly not offering to my students some knowledge which I possess and they do not. Even in a lecturing situation, the intonation of my voice is a questioning one; alternatives are being proposed and a judgment is being invited, not offered. The frequent question, "Is that clear?" implies not, "Will you be able to reproduce that in the exam?" but "Can you use that to get you started? Does that get you any further forward, or leave you stuck where you were?"

For we are engaged, I think, in a sort of tripartite dialogue:



One of my jobs is to bring that writer alive as a living "maker," a man to be watched creating language, so that we are, as it were, asking him what he is doing, why he is doing it, and how he is doing it. The impression I most want to avoid is that we are examining a product, a dead object. If I believed that the object was dead, I would leave it reverently in the grave. If I teach a work of literature it is because I believe it to be alive and to have something to say to me and to my students: that is, to be capable of being involved in my dialogue of three.

What is it that I ask myself in these awful first moments of a lesson when the three participants are sitting separate and have to come together? Certainly not, "What do my students need to know?" nor "How on earth can this shower be expected to understand a text like this?" These I regard as recipes for destruction: destruction of the class, the text, and me.

And my vanity secures me against suicidal tendencies, if not murder. No, I start with the conviction that the job can be done and that if it isn't done the fault is mine. Vanity does not prevent me from observing that the fault is often mine. I hope no one thinks that because the editor has asked me to say why I teach literature, I am some kind of oracle. Here I am to speak what I do know, a small part of the truth. Do not mistake my enthusiastic conviction for authority.

What I ask myself is deceptively simple in appearance and brutally complex in reality. I say to myself, "What is at the heart of the experience which this writer was involved with, and what entry for my pupils to that central, that focal, thing can I devise?" You may feel like protesting that this is unhelpful; that only a genius could answer these two questions, or that anyone who can answer these two questions doesn't need to read *Teaching English*. True, sadly true. Nevertheless, defective as we are, we will, I think, find it useful to act as if we were not, and to tackle these two questions. Not to tackle these two questions is to shirk our responsibilities, to run away from both our pupils and our text. The fact that our answers are imperfect is in the nature of things and must not intimidate us or exempt us from trying. But more, we are not claiming perfection. What we are doing is exploring an area of human experience with the aid of the author. Our first question is not a disguised answer. It does no more than start us off on a voyage of uncertain destination. If it gets the ropes away, that is fine; the engine-room is quite another matter: its power comes from the experiences the three participants can bring together, and the verbal skills they can muster.

The first question, then, will not be about facts, nor will it concern techniques, nor will it ask for a literary judgment. It will be, maybe, about the kind of woman so-and-so is in the poem, or how you would react if you were in the hero's place, or how you would speak those words.

My way of going about the job is based on my notion of how we all read. When you read something for the first time, you don't go for the subtle details, do you? I myself take a big, crude grab to it, absorbing only the broadest

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aspects, getting the general drift of things: the story-line, or the atmosphere, or the writer's tone. I then digest this with the saliva of some of my own experience, a process which varies immensely with the nature of the material but will always include some kind of sizing-up of the experience, a savouring of it. Thereafter I go back to the text with a finer tool, a net with a closer mesh, and repeat the digestive process, with, of course, more subtle digestive juices. And so on, back and forward with, more and more refined approaches until I have exhausted my powers both of apprehension and of comprehension.

And that is how I try to teach, but in a more co-operative way, bringing to my aid all the glands of internal secretion of all the members of the class, involving myself in a teaching procedure which is a learning process, an open-minded, open-ended one in which there are preconceptions, but none which are unmodifiable. The aim of each question is to make further questions less necessary — ideally, unnecessary.

The whole procedure is a truly educational one because it is creative: we are all verbalising experience which incorporates the writer's experience and our own. His verbalisation of his experience is the great stimulus to our verbalising ours, and as we verbalise ours (which includes his) we come to appreciate and to understand not only his experience but his verbalising of it. And so we move towards a reduction to order of that terrifying chaos in which life brings experience to us.

You will appreciate that this must be an unhurried procedure. Our pupils must have time to absorb. Urgent pressures towards answers are fruitless distractions from the true problem, which is to find one's own questions. Ultimately one's own questions are the only ones that matter; they are one's digestive juices making available to the spirit the nourishment which lies in the experience of the author and in our own experience.

Is it becoming clear why I teach literature? I certainly hope it is clear that I do not teach it as a duty, or as a miserable chore, or as preparation for an examination, or with my eye on what someone else thinks or expects. Basically, I teach it because I love it, and I love it because I know it matters to me. I believe also that it matters—at very different levels, of course—to everyone. I do not believe that there is any person, however modest his equipment, who is incapable of profiting, in important ways for his growth, from contact with appropriate literary works.

I am well aware that I have just used a series of question-begging words: matters, different levels, equipment, profiting, appropriate. Must I spell them out? I myself feel at ease with their Empsonian ambiguities, or multivalencies, as we might more accurately call them. But for my more rigorous challengers a word or two more may be called for.

The personal experience of any one person is restricted. He finds this irksome, frustrating, unsatisfying, disturbing. If he is clever, or luckily stimulated by his environment, he sets out to extend it, to find his Grail. If he is very unclever and very unlucky in his environment, he may become worried or restless or violent, not knowing what is wrong with him but vaguely aware of a lack. In any case, his proper development depends upon his reaching through other people some other pieces of experience which will enable him to make a pattern:

> "Turning, returning, till there grew a pattern,
> And it was held."

Literature is, of course, only one of the ways in which these pieces of others' experience can be reached. There are those who believe that it is gradually becoming outmoded and that it will be replaced by the visual expression of the cinema. I am not one of them. I do not believe that the other modes of communication can approach words in their precision of reference, a precision which springs, in characteristic paradox, from their ambiguity. The writer works by manipulating in context the multiple meanings which words offer. When Milton describes his goddess Mirth as "buxom, blithe, and debonair," each added word substracts from as well as adds to the preceding one(s). When we teach literature, therefore, not only are we offering an approach to others' experience, but we are offering that experience in an exceptionally valuable form; in a precisely shaped form which imposes on that tripartite dialogue of mine a rigorous discipline which itself enriches all the participants because it enables them to emerge from it, not only with an extension of experience, but with improved equipment for approaching

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all the experience that is to come. Essentially what we do is to examine all the choices which the writer has made: in lexis; in connotation; in structures at all the levels of phrase, sentence, paragraph, chapter, verse, scene, act; in sound (including rhythms); in form; in genre. By examining these choices in some new structure of our own devising or improvisation, we extend our experience not in some sloppy, emotional, hysterical fashion, but in the way which makes it most fruitful to ourselves both immediately and for later developments. How wonderful it is to teach material which carries within itself all the supports that we need. It offers the experiences which our pupils need for their growth and development and also the tools for fostering new growth as it appears.

There must by this time be some among my readers who are very uneasy. To them what I have said will sound most unscholarly and perhaps even unliterary. Nothing about literary history; about training to make critical judgments; about technical terminology; about the imaginative life; about the stages of growth in literary taste? Nothing. In writing of why I teach literature I have said a good deal about how I teach it; but not everything. If you read closely what I have said about "how," you will find signs that these scholarly matters are not forgotten. But they are not central to the issue of "why" and, I believe, should not be. Literary history should be a resource in my mind, not an objective of my lesson; critical judgments I find important on detail, but on the broad sweep mostly absurd in the average classroom, something to be identified as a necessary, but very, very tentative procedure; the imaginative life is best kept as close to real life as possible, and I am mostly conscious of trying to bring the two together. What my mind is on is that extension of my narrow experience and the wonderful words that achieve it.

WHY I TEACH POETRY

JOHN O'NEILL
Assistant Headmaster, St Mungo's Academy, Glasgow

When I first started teaching, I taught poetry simply because it was taken for granted that I would do so. This is still largely true. Having now been asked to justify what I have always taken for granted, I have come to realise that over the years poetry has gradually assumed a much greater share of my time in class, until now the idea of teaching English without poetry is to me entirely unthinkable.

As English teachers we have, I believe, two distinct aims, one immediate, the other perhaps more distant. Our immediate aim is to develop our pupils' skill in the basic elements of communication by language — listening, speaking, reading and writing. This is true not only in their early years of schooling but throughout their careers. The second aim is what makes our subject so challenging and so rewarding—the fact that we are trying to help our pupils to develop their whole personalities, to widen their interests, to deepen their sensitivity, to make them aware of their fellow men and of their own place among them. Our subject is not merely grammar, composition, punctuation, interpretation: it is "the whole man alive." I can perhaps imagine our immediate aim being at least partially achieved without any great recourse to literature, but to make any success in our second aim we need the stimulus of literature in general and poetry in particular. I believe this to be true at all stages and at all levels of ability, but particularly in the later stages, where it seems to me that literature should occupy the central place in the pupils' education. Given a wide and well-chosen course of literature and enthusiastic presentation of it, everything else will follow in its wake. Of all its forms, I think poetry the most valuable. Of course, nothing I say is to decry the place of the novel and the play. These are simply not in my remit.

When I was asked to write this article, I began by jotting down—not in any particular order—a list of my own reasons for teaching poetry. It is probably not an exhaustive list, and not all of the reasons are very weighty, but it contains enough, I think, to justify poetry as a subject for teaching. What I wrote down is as follows:

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Most pupils like it.

It sharpens awareness of language.

It opens the mind to new thoughts in a striking and effective way.

This carries over into their own language because they have more things to say.

They become more conscious in their own writing.

It can lead on to "creative" writing of poetry.

It is *there*, in the exams.

It is a great single lesson, or a filler, or part of a theme, or whatever you want—it is totally adaptable.

It offers an opening into our "literary heritage"—for some.

"They'll like it later"—a discredited notion with regard to, for example, the old way of teaching the Catechism, but in poetry there is some truth in it.

Notice that there is no mention of terms such as "beauty" or "sublimity". To me, these are concepts and experiences which are unteachable. No doubt we all remember the shiver of delight we experienced on first encountering certain poems (for me they were romantic, supernatural pieces such as *La Belle Dame sans Merci*, *Morte d'Arthur* and *Christabel*), but no one had to tell us they were beautiful or sublime. We simply knew it. To try to *teach* such a thing is a waste of time. I prefer to concentrate on content and technique, aiming to expand the view of life, to promote recognition of how language works, and to increase consciousness in the pupils' own writing—not just of poetry but in all forms of composition. The "beauty" will come of its own accord or not at all.

Of course the teaching of poetry is not the same at all stages. There are, I think, three very broad stages to be distinguished: the first, from infancy to the lower secondary stage; the second, the middle school; the third, the upper school.

It is surely undisputed that poetry—or verse at least—gives great pleasure to young children. Recently I sat with my six-year-old child in a hospital waiting-room. At one point I glanced at the comic she was avidly reading and noticed one title: "Bobby in Blue and his Sister Sue." No educational organisation is more keenly aware of the literary tastes of the young than the D. C. Thomson organisation, and they clearly realise that to the six-year-old such things as rhyme, rhythm and alliteration are good selling points. This liking for poetry continues through the primary stages. I well remember from my own experience in primary teaching 25 years ago the great success achieved with poems such as *The Highwayman* and *Silver*. Similar success continued when I moved into secondary teaching in an annexe confined to first and second years. All kinds of rousing narrative poetry were popular, particularly when battles and violent deaths were involved. The most successful poems were written in fairly simple language, with regular patterns of rhyme and rhythm. All this is still largely true, though the contemporary "sociological" poetry also works well—Philip Larkin's *Take One Home for the Kiddies*, for example. The current emphasis on creative writing has led to less importance being placed on regularity of rhyme and rhythm, and the best pupils can at quite an early age produce pieces with real poetic insight—though much of it is overrated by its devotees and is no more than chopped-up prose.

In the lower school, then, our pupils have a built-in liking for poetry. It is up to us to choose for them the poems which will prove stimulating. I have known one teacher who could not understand why he could get little response from a moderate second year class to *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*. In his foreword to his well-known anthology, *The Poetry Makers*, James McGrath puts the point well:

> "A final word about my ultimate canon of selection: when faced with the choice, I have always preferred the concrete image to the abstract, the eventful to the static."

Even in the lower school there can be some resistance to poetry, but it is in the middle school, when loutishness so often sets in however temporarily, that problems can arise. For those who retain their willingness to be receptive, there is no problem apart from ensuring that the poems they encounter become progressively more sophisticated and more demanding. It is at this stage and with such pupils that a closer look at the techniques of poetry should be taken. In effect, a start can be made to a course in Practical Criticism, demonstrating the various devices of grammar, lexis, imagery and sound by which poetry

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makes its special effect. Here too creative writing can often produce very impressive results. Unfortunately, there are those other pupils who dig in their heels and defy us to interest them in any way. This, however, is not a problem confined to the teaching of poetry. It is just as true of any other branch of English teaching—and of French, maths, geography, or anything else. It is not really that they are uninterested: quite often they are not prepared to admit to interest for fear of losing face with their friends. It is usually no more than a phase—the unacceptable face of adolescence. I would never claim to have all the answers to the problems faced in teaching such pupils, but I would maintain that poetry offers at least as good a chance of catching them off guard as anything else. Certinly I have always found it so, though often with individuals rather than with an entire class. It is hard to say what kind of poem will achieve the breakthrough. I have known one teacher who, year after year, by force of personality and skilful dramatic reading, achieved the miracle of conversion with *Sohrab and Rastum*. For myself, there is no single poem that is guaranteed to do the trick. I prefer to make the attempt with modern "adult" poems, and some that have proved successful have been *In the Snack Bar*, *Your Attention Please*, *Five Ways to Kill a Man*, *Dulce et Decorum Est*, *The Shield of Achilles*, *The Coming of the Wee Malkies*, and the lesser-known *The Good Thief* by Tom Leonard. Each year I am prepared to try anything, and usually manage to get through to some at least. With these pupils, I must admit, I am concerned almost entirely with content rather than technique, though naturally any line that seems profitable is always followed.

When we come to the upper school, we are dealing with pupils who are more or less willing. If nothing else stimulates their interest, there is what can be for them the most powerful stimulus of all, the S.C.E. exams. At this stage there is a vast amount of good material. Nothing, really, is unsuitable. The best rule for the teacher, I think, is that he should teach those poems that have a strong appeal for himself and not those that he thinks will excite the interest of the pupil. A teacher's enthusiasm can be very infectious. Here the content should be stimulating, covering "inner experiences" of all sorts and unfolding new ideas on questions of morality, social consciousness, and the great issues facing man. At this stage content should never be enough. It is now that the pupil can discover, by examination of technique, what it is that distinguishes the poem from any other form. By now he will be coming close to the idea of a poem as being a complete entity, a work of art. Poetry, I think, makes this realisation possible more readily than the novel or the play, where there is always a danger that interest in the story, or at best the themes, will obstruct interest in its other features. The poem, which is so much more obviously a work of conscious construction, with its rather special lexical choice, its imagery, its sound patterns, and above all the feeling of completeness with which it makes its point, can really open our pupils' eyes to the nature of literary composition.

At the top end of the school we have our work with post-Higher pupils, usually engaged in C.S.Y.S. work. Here the place of poetry hardly needs to be discussed. Both in creative writing and in the study of the prescribed texts, enthusiasm is widespread and the results are often remarkably good. It is when working at this level that we can discover that all our work in poetry, from the lower school upwards, has been well worth while.

There is one matter connected with the choice of suitable poems which should be mentioned: should we concentrate on the contemporary rather than the "classical"? My own inclination is towards the contemporary, especially at the awkward middle stage or with any group who have difficulties of understanding or some kind of resistance to poetry. To such pupils, poetry of any earlier period can seem to be fossilised. The language may be unfamiliar, and the content may appear to have no relevance to their situation. But the classical side must be covered too if our pupils are not to be deprived of worthwhile experience. There is no problem here in the lower school, provided the style and content are attractive to the young. In the middle school, perhaps only the willing should be offered much beyond the contemporary. In the upper school, the two will go hand in hand. I am not inclined to take the word "contemporary" literally, however, preferring to think in terms of "modern" poetry rather than what is strictly contemporary. We should realise, of course, that to young people today poets such as Yeats and Eliot, who are modern to us, are virtually classical writers.

Not only, I feel, should a great deal of the

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poetry we teach be modern: it should also be local. We have our few great Scottish poets of the past; we have major modern figures such as Edwin Muir; but above all we have a large number of good contemporary poets writing in all parts of Scotland, and their work is coming to be more readily available in schools. The more local the writing the better. For me, working in the largely derelict Townhead district of Glasgow, nothing could be more suitable than Stephen Mulrine's *The Coming of the Wee Malkies* or *Nostalgie*, both products, by a former pupil, of the area in which the school stands. All my pupils are familiar with Rottenrow, George Square, Buchanan Street and Glasgow Green, where several Edwin Morgan poems are set, and many of them live in Bridgeton, where his King Billy lived, or in Riddrie, where he is buried. They are Celtic supporters almost to a man, and they get a special thrill in Tom Leonard's *The Good Thief* when they are encouraged to remember Christ's promise of paradise to the thief on the cross while recognising the allusion to their own special "Paradise" in the closing lines:

> " nearly three a cloke thinoo
> dork init
> good jobe theyve gote thi lights."

Beyond the strictly local, there is the poetry of other parts of Scotland. George Mackay Brown, for instance, has not the same immediate appeal for my pupils, but some of his poems (*Old Fisherman with Guitar* and *The Old Women*, for example) can be very successful in broadening their interest in their own country—just as, presumably, the young Orcadian will find his horizons extending as he goes from his local scene towards the society with which my pupils are familiar. Several recent anthologies, such as *The Ring of Words* and *Voices of Our Kind*, have helped a great deal in making the work of Scottish poets available to us. I have found them very useful, with one reservation: my pupils like their poems to be written either in English or in their own local dialect. They have so far remained indifferent to Lallans, braid Scots, or anything other than their own two languages.

Having strayed away from my original topic of why I teach poetry to the kind of poetry I teach, I should like to stray a little further and discuss briefly how I teach it. Actually, I am not at all sure that I do teach it. Rather I choose poems and present them, and wait to see what takes place. Years ago, like most English teachers, I had a relatively small repertoire of poems about which I knew a fair amount. I knew all the right questions to ask and the responses to expect. I knew when to give direct instructions, and when to allow brief discussion. Above all, I knew how to condense all that was necessary into a brief note to be filed for reference. Like most English teachers, I have long since abandoned all this. In a sense, I have no repertoire; in another sense, my repertoire is vast and constantly growing. It seems to me now that our primary task as teachers of poetry is to have in reserve just such a repertoire and be able to select from it whatever seems most appropriate for the class (or individual pupil) and the situation. Selection of material is almost everything. Thereafter, the poem has to be worked on by teacher and class together — the teacher, of course, being ready to use his superior knowledge and (presumably) more advanced insights to shape the discussion and iron out difficulties. But never should he impose his judgment and opinions on his class. If, after discussion, the poem has said little to the pupil, there is no point in telling him what it ought to have said. Better to move on and try again. In time, and with a sufficient supply of poems, most pupils will find some which affect them and about which they will be able to express their responses without being told what to say by way of notes. Having in my time read many thousands of badly digested notes in S.C.E. scripts (at least 90% of them on *Tam o' Shanter*, *Dulce et Decorum Est* and *Ode to Autumn*), I am very happy to think that no marker will ever be called on to read any such notes compiled by me. One of the great virtues of our present S.C.E. set-up is that it puts a premium on knowledge of text and genuineness of response, and imposes a handicap on the prepared answer. The method of teaching, therefore, is simple—present the poem, and let the poet do the teaching.

After these digressions, I must now return to my topic and bring it to an end. Why do I teach poetry? From my original hap-hazard list of reasons I extract the most important, this time arranged in ascending order of importance:

> I teach poetry because external examinations demand that I do.

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I teach poetry because I like it and my pupils like it.

I teach poetry because nothing else can be so easily adapted to fit any purpose or any slot in the teaching day.

I teach poetry because it is of immense value in all aspects of the pupils' linguistic development.

I teach poetry because of its unique contribution to the moral, intellectual, social and emotional development of the pupils.

WHY I TEACH THE NOVEL

JAMES M. ALISON

Deputy Rector, Hazlehead Academy, Aberdeen

"These Books are written chiefly to the Young, the Ignorant, and the Idle, to whom they serve as Lectures of Conduct, and Introduction into Life."

The Rambler, 4.

Do not take the "I" too seriously. I hope that my reasons for teaching the novel, in all their dubious variety, differ very little from your own, and are shared by most teachers of English, but I cannot be sure. Certainly I have no unique insights to offer: the problems and the available solutions have already been thoroughly discussed in the pages of this journal and elsewhere. What follows is merely a personal, perhaps eccentric, speculation upon our professional motives and methods. The First Person is not used, as the title might suggest, to proclaim revelation but to avoid presumption.

Postponing, for the moment at least, the worry of defining terms, I suppose that I "teach the novel" because I think the novel is worth reading. The teaching is meant to develop the reading. Easily said!

I have gained pleasure and satisfaction from novel reading and I am encouraged by this experience and the opinions of other readers, other teachers, critics, and the novelists themselves, to believe that what I have enjoyed and (who is to gainsay it?) benefited from, my pupils will also benefit from. This kind of arrogant, largely unexplored assumption is, of course, fundamental to most educational activity: because a thing has, in our judgment, been good for us, it is also likely to be good for our pupils. Thus is our culture transmitted.

To shift emphasis then, why do I *read* novels? As a teacher I have available the circular argument that I read novels because I must find work for my pupils to study. This is frivolous perhaps, but for most of us it is real enough. We cannot possibly be Common Readers—our motives are hopelessly compromised. But assume that we are for once, as of old, reading for ourselves. What do we get out of the activity? It depends on what we are looking for—information, entertainment, wish-fulfilment, guidance. What I derive from a novel is an overwhelming experience of the virtual world created by the author. The novel is for me a take-over bid. I find myself for a time preoccupied with an illusion of other people, other actions, other places, other times, other values—all organised by a mind whose complexion differs from my own, but is not entirely alien.

From my earliest adventures in novel-reading this impact has always been very vivid. The death of Blind Pew on the road as he "gently collapsed upon his face and moved no more" is still about its business in the imagination some thirty years after I first read it. (The artistry of "gently" has something to do with it.) When Jim Hawkins says at the end of the novel:

> "The worst dreams that ever I have are when I hear the surf booming about its coasts or start upright with the sharp voice of Captain Flint still ringing in my ears,"

he is speaking also of the hold that the novel itself has had over the mind of at least one reader.

What I have come to expect of fiction is defined by Conrad:

> "The demand of the individual to the artist is in effect the cry, 'Take me out of myself'."

You may object that this reduces the novel to mere escapism; but that is a name-calling reaction that devalues the role of the human imagination. There is nothing trivial in Conrad's view of the novelist as compassionate stoic:

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> "He speaks to the subtle, but invincible conviction of solidarity that knits the loneliness of innumerable hearts, to the solidarity in dreams, in joy, in sorrow, in aspirations, in illusions . . . which binds together all humanity."

Not the terms, perhaps, in which one commends *Kestrel for a Knave* to the Third Year on a wet afternoon; but they do go some way towards defining Hines's achievement in that work, and its appeal for even the most reluctant readers. They suggest why novels are worth bothering about, why it is worth persevering with them in class, whether at the level of *Escape on Monday* or *Sons and Lovers*.

If there is a mystical, quasi-religious ring about this—being taken out of oneself in order to find oneself—we need not be surprised. The roots of fiction go very deep.

As teachers we have tended to tame what the novel has to offer, in acceptable pedagogic terms. NATE's survey *Reading Together* (Kenyon Calthrop, 1971) offers formulations such as these:

> ". . . extend the child's experience and knowledge of life."
>
> ". . . help the child's personal growth."

When pressed by the taxonomists, the English teacher is by training well equipped to use words in this way to cover his confusion. Reading *per se* and its accompanying satisfactions have always been educationally rather suspect. I well remember the plight of a young English teacher when a parent complained to the school that one period a week his son was "just reading stories." The trouble is that you cannot tell what is going on in a child's mind when he is rapt in a novel in the way that you can be reasonably confident of his mental processes in the course of a piece of translation or a mathematical problem. For a teacher such evident lack of control can be embarrassing. Moreover, what the child says when you ask him to write or talk about the book bears, in its feebleness, manifestly little relationship to his intimate experiences of living—through the story.

We thus find it necessary to justify the time spent on the novel by employing it as a basis for other English activities—perhaps as material for a "unit study," in contemporary Scottish terms. There is much to be said for the unit study with younger pupils. It carries us clear of the unfortunate suggestion associated with the theory of "Stage One," that the average First Year pupil is not ready for a course of text based studies. It all depends on the texts, surely! Unit studies are at least a recognition of the happy fact that educational publishing has today, as never before, made available a wealth of fiction offering something to every level of ability and interest.

Obviously there is a good deal to be said for using younger pupils' enjoyment of a novel as a stimulus to varied work developing the basic communication skills. It is possible, however, that the unit study programme may merely extinguish the pleasure that is supposed to motivate it. As Mr Angus MacPhee points out in a persuasive article *(Children's Writing)* in this journal, Vol. 5, No. 1,

> "We are in danger of obscuring the real value and function of children's fiction when we use it as a stimulus to writing which moves away from the novel rather than back into it."

As teachers we shall always be tempted to use the novel in different ways for different ends with different groups — Common Course, ROSLA, Certificate: but at the risk of oversimplifying complex curricular issues, I hazard the principle that any "use" that neglects the novel as "private transport" is really an abuse. I am happy to take my stand on Conrad's claim. The novel "takes me out of myself."

To revert to the earlier promise of definition, what do we mean by *the novel?* It is, in terms of my own department's current requisition—*The Lantern Bearers, Since that Party, The High House, The Treasure of the Sierra Madre, The Millstone, Fair stood the wind for France, The Grass is Singing, The Mayor of Casterbridge*—a mixed bunch, certainly! Development of a connected plot; interrelationship of characters; some elaboration of setting—all of these are features of the novel, but what seems to me its crucial defining quality is its length. In a recent review in these pages I have already alluded to the length of the novel and its implications.

Length makes the novel extremely awkward for the teacher. But the experience of immersion in another world, of living in someone else's created universe, that all good novels afford is a function of a certain length. Length for the novelist is the analogue of Time, Forster's "interminable tapeworm." In absolute terms length varies, of course, from *Sam and Me* to *Middlemarch;* but relative to the capacities of the reader there must be present

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the challenge of some length and complexity so that for a time, and with some initial effort, the reader gets involved and taken over by the work. This is the essential that distinguishes the novel from the material on which my colleagues are writing—drama and poetry. Some plays are longish, some poems very long; but in these the feature of length is not definitive. The play is an intense social experience, "a two hours' traffic" to be enacted by a group and appreciated by an audience: the poem offers a flash of personal insight, a Eureka experience of recognition perhaps. But neither affords the prolonged private experience of the novel. Length is the difficulty but it is also the vital ingredient.

In my experience most of the complaints that our pupils make can be related directly or indirectly to this central matter. "It's too long." "It's too slow." "it's boring." "he uses too many words." We are all familiar with these reactions, from Years I to III, from "non-readers" to CSYS candidates. Most of the fiction that I have to offer for the Later Stages comes in for this kind of censure—*A High Wind in Jamaica, A Farewell to Arms, The Great Gatsby, The Catcher in the Rye, Brighton Rock, Lord of the Flies, Cat's Cradle, Catch—22, This Sporting Life, The Member of the Wedding, Brave New World, The Heart of Darkness*. Nor is the criticism confined to "class-readers." Even now, at the beginning of the session, when the admittedly inadequate stock of senior fiction is still on the shelves, there is very little that our Certificate pupils will admit to finding attractive as private reading.

Whatever "teaching the novel" may mean, it requires the teacher to grapple with this problem. Which does the compelling? The novel or the teacher? He must try somehow to bring his pupils to appreciate that the effort which novel reading calls for brings substantial rewards. The senior pupil will dutifully, if grudgingly, do what he believes necessary for the award of a Certificate pass, but that is not the main satisfaction which novel reading has to offer!

It does not do to be complacent and assume that our pupils are simply idle, scatter-brained and too easily distracted. Undeniably contemporary life styles make it difficult for the adolescent to find opportunity or encouragement for private reading. Circumstances are against him and the competition of other forms of entertainment is often too powerful. Whatever librarians and publishers may say, my subjective impression is that children generally are reading much less than they did when I started teaching, sixteen years ago.

It is sometimes argued that the novel is an obsolete high-bourgeois culture form, and that we are misguided in offering it to our pupils as intrinsically superior to the films and television that they obviously prefer. Our attempts to compel them towards it are regarded as just one more damning sign of the schools' authoritarian contempt for the values of the community that they are called upon to serve. The Mass v. Minority Culture debate, as it impinges upon "English," is a complex one and I commend it to the editor as a possible theme for a future issue. But all that one can do here, at the risk of sounding owlish, is to testify where one stands. It seems to me a *trahison des clercs* not to suggest to the senior pupil who prefers *Shaft* and *Up Pompeii* to *A Passage to India* and *Women in Love* that his values may be wrong. Whatever the alleged defects of its origins, the novel guarantees, through its fundamental formal and structural concerns, certain humane values. It is anchored to an interest in the uniqueness of the personality and its adventures in time. This seems "a proper study." On the other hand, a good deal of contemporary popular art and entertainment, and the minority art from which it partly derives, embodies the aesthetic philosophy of Tamburlane. It is totally contemptuous of the individual and makes pretty patterns of skulls—for self-glorification and profit. If we reject our liberal values as merely the delusions of an effete Western cultural imperialism, then we resign ourselves to the holocaust. One need not subscribe to all the *Black Book* scriptures on education to accept that there is some point to their warning that "The sleep of reason brings forth monsters."

As I have already suggested, novel reading is a peculiarly private process. We cannot predict what the effect of a book on any given pupil will be. Moreover we are hesitant about claiming any very direct link between art and behaviour. As George Steiner has suggested, "here may be a covert, betraying link between the cultivation of aesthetic response and the potential of personal *inhumanity*." Generally, however, we tend to believe that, in some vague way, works of art operate to extend human

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sympathies. In this nebulous sense, I believe that the novel is likely to be beneficial for adolescents—but do not ask me to prove it.

In the *Times Educational Supplement* of 20th April, Stephen James reported on the results of a small-scale analysis of the leisure reading of sixteen-year-old boys in an English Grammar School. The three most popular books were *Skinhead*, *Suedehead* and *Chopper*. My own observations confirm this. What are we to make of it? Nothing very much perhaps. It is natural enough that such works, with their emphasis on sensational sex and violence should be popular with adolescents. They possess the novel's quality of escape certainly, but they lack the compassion which Arnold Bennett saw as its essential quality. They lack it in both the author's presentation of human relationships and his attitude to his readers. Such books exploit their readers cynically. One is reluctant to discourage any reading that pupils willingly undertake; but the only possible use to which these could be put is as a contrast in favour of more humane and (using the word carefully) decent fictions. But I think that, Mr James included, we are over-optimistic if we suppose that by starting here, from what the pupils really enjoy, we can easily lead them to appreciate anything we should recognize as a novel.

Another frequent school grouse about the novel is that it is *depressing*. This complaint, coming as it does from both pupils and staff, is worth examining closely. As it happens, most of the texts currently in use with our senior classes are twentieth century works; and the form the complaint often takes is that *modern* novels are depressing. This has been put to me so often that, being largely responsible for the choice of books, I begin to fear that I am falling into a morbid decline and that it is starting to show. When I have asked colleagues to suggest some less despondent material, we have not progressed very far.

My obvious addiction to Conrad's theory of fiction arises, in fact, out of a re-reading last session of *The Nigger of the Narcissus*. A colleague helpfully suggested this as possibly a less negative work than a *Farewell to Arms* or *Brighton Rock* or *Catcher in the Rye*. We both re-read the book—I leave you to conclude whether we ordered it or not! At the time, I was greatly taken by the artistic credo with which Conrad prefaced *The Nigger*.

To search for novels, whether modern or not, that are not "depressing" is, I believe, a notable waste of energy. All novels deal with the human condition, directly or indirectly (consider *Tarka the Otter* or the recent *Watership Down*). They thus necessarily deal with a sad story. The Novelist's central artistic concern is with the individual in time. "Men stand like giants immersed in Time," said Proust. And really, for the non-religious person at least, there can only be one ending.

"Will there ever be a singer
Whose music will smooth away
The furrow drawn by Adam's finger
Across the meadow and the wave?"

What has been called in a rather different context "the sense of an ending" gives fiction its essential sobriety. The happy endings of the 19th century novel are put-up jobs which we tolerate or not, according to the skill of the writer. As Bernard Bergonzi wrote of Jane Austen's heroines:

"And yet somehow she never quite said
A word about what happened then,
How they managed with breakfast or bed."

The distinction between modern and earlier novels is surely a false one: Scott, Dickens and Thackery at their most sensitive can hardly be considered breezily inspirational.

It does not follow that when the truth is told the reader need be depressed. Would he prefer to be deluded? As Conrad says, "If I succeed you shall find *according to your deserts:* encouragement, consolation, fear, charm—all that you demand—and perhaps that glimpse of truth which you have forgotten to ask."

Nor does it follow (see Mr Blackburn's *Predilections* in the May issue) that because a novel portrays "self concern and social bewilderment" it will also induce it in its readers. It is just as likely to prevent it. I am really arguing that what we sometimes stigmatize as the depressing quality of the modern novel is really the reflex of the novelist's compassion and is, for pupil and teacher alike, part of the integral challenge of fiction. It is what makes the novel worthwhile.

In dwelling upon matters related to the length and difficulty of the novel, I have neglected a great many interrelated aspects of the teaching of fiction. Given time, space and ingenuity, I should have tried to consider such topics as:

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the phenomenon of *Toplin*ers; the historical novel; the place of Scottish fiction; *A Clockword Orange*; film and TV versions of novels; reading aloud with the least able pupils; simplified and shortened novels; school library v. class library; modern v. classic, short stories; the demands of Higher Paper III C.S.Y.S. . . .

Instead I conclude with a " true confession." I once came upon a fifth year girl surreptitiously reading *Crime and Punishment* under the desk at a time when the rest of the class were attempting a Higher interpretation exercise. When mildly vexed with this curious behaviour, she replied, " I don't like English: I just like reading.

WHY I TEACH DRAMA

RICHARD HENDRY
Principal Teacher of English, Falkirk High School

The teaching of drama in a secondary school is influenced by various considerations which do not affect the teaching of other forms of literature such as poetry and the novel. What drama the English teacher teaches and how he teaches it is to some extent determined by the conditions which exist in the school. Is there a drama department in the school? If so, which classes have specialist drama teaching? If so, what facilities does it contain and does the English teacher have access to it? If he has not, or if there is no drama studio, is there any other drama space made available to the English department or is the English teacher confined to a small classroom with thirty to forty pupils squeezed into it, and a couple of square yards' " acting space " between the front row and the blackboard?

While there has been some improvement in the provision of drama space of one kind or another and while the number of specialist drama teachers continues to increase each year, it is still, I believe, the English teacher who, in most schools, is responsible for the teaching of drama. Often, regrettably, the only place provided for its teaching is the teacher's normal classroom.

Drama, for such a teacher, should include many different activities: mime, creative drama, improvisation, role-playing, the study of textual drama, etc. Which of these activities the English teacher pursues will be determined by a knowledge of his own limitations, the number of pupils in the class and the size of the classroom.

For the purpose of this article, I propose to limit what I have to say to drama as literature. This is not to imply that other areas of drama work are not equally, or perhaps even more, important; nor is it meant to imply that such activities as role-playing or improvisation, for example, are the concern of the drama teacher only. Clearly, where such activities arise casually and naturally out of other English work, it will be profitable to pursue them. Drama as literature has, however, always been the main concern of the English teacher and it will continue to be so no matter how many teachers of drama are appointed in the future. (It might be helpful to refer at this point to the excellent series of articles on drama published in the October, 1972, issue of *Teaching English*. These deal, on the whole, with those areas of drama work which in this article I have chosen to ignore.)

Why then teach drama, particularly drama as literature? Are there any special advantages to be gained from the teaching of drama as compared with poetry or the novel?

Perhaps one of the most valuable aspects of the drama lesson is that it is so obviously a corporate activity. Whether one is play-reading in the classroom or acting it out in the drama space, drama is a group activity and affords opportunities to all pupils to contribute according to their individual abilities. Certainly with younger pupils there is usually little difficulty in persuading even the quietest to become personally involved in the performance. It is not always so easy to engage such pupils in the study of poems or short stories. I have frequently noticed, too, again with younger pupils, that, given the opportunity to choose what they might do, the choice is often a play. One good reason for teaching drama is, then, that the pupils (certainly the younger ones) enjoy it.

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Two factors, however, are likely to affect their enjoyment. The first, over which the teacher usually has no control, is whether the drama lesson has to be taught in the limiting confines of the classroom or the more relaxing yet stimulating confines of a drama studio. The second is the choice of texts. While there is a wealth of good plays for older pupils, suitable drama texts for young pupils are hard to come by, but there are a few (e.g. in the B.B.C. "Listening and Writing" series) which are within their compass and to which they respond readily.

I make no apologies for stressing this perhaps rather obvious first reason for teaching drama. The first impact I wish literature to make on young pupils is one of pleasure and, if they enjoy their drama, this is a good reason for teaching it.

One of the advantages which drama, textual as well as improvised, has is that it makes demands upon the pupil for immediate involvement in the situation in a more direct manner than that required by any other form of literature. To identify with a character in a novel or to share the feeling of the poet requires the pupils to make the kind of imaginative leap that not all of them find easy. There are many pupils, I suspect, for whom poetry remains an impersonal, artificial, distanced experience. A play, on the other hand, with its apparent closer imitation of real life as the pupil knows it, affords him an easier entry. This sense of immediacy, of recognition of a relevant experience is not only to be had from twentieth century realistic drama; it can, with older pupils, just as readily be achieved from a Shakespeare play or a piece of twentieth century "absurd" drama.

Proof of this more direct impact which I am claiming for drama is hard to find, but I have frequently observed, when reading a short story or extract from a novel to a class, it is when the text most closely approximates to drama (i.e. when reading a sustained piece of dialogue) that the listening response of the class markedly improves. Clearly, all genuine literature contains an imaginative life of its own. All I am suggesting here is that, in drama, it is more easily tapped.

If this is so, then it follows from the pupils' more immediate imaginative participation in the world of the play that the values which are claimed for the study of all literature are well provided for in drama: a confrontation with human problems which may help each pupil deal more effectively with his own; an insight into values which are different from those he has acquired from his own limited experience; an enrichment of his imagination and an enlargement of his knowledge and understanding of human behaviour.

I do not wish to argue the case here for the value of literature in general, or drama in particular, in developing mental, moral and spiritual growth. If I did not think there was such a case, however, there would be little reason for continuing to teach it and I believe that the study of drama has much to contribute to this development.

So far I have suggested that drama can both entertain and edify and that its directness of impact facilitates these effects. There are, of course, other reasons for teaching it. All works of literature demand a sophisticated awareness of how language works and each genre makes its own peculiar demands on the linguistic resourcefulness of its reader. Drama, for example, frequently exhibits a variety of colloquial and dialectal usage which is difficult to find in such a concentrated form in other types of literature. Certain linguistic devices, for example irony in its most subtle forms, are perhaps more powerfully present in drama. The exciting rhetorical language of, for example, the forum scene in *Julius Caesar* is again a linguistic experience peculiar to drama. In all of these, and other ways, the study of a play affords the pupil repeated opportunities to discover how language works and helps him to use it more skilfully himself, not only in the constructing of his own little plays but on his writing in general.

The variety of possible ways of introducing a play to a class is another good reason for studying drama. I do not wish to imply that the presentation of a poem or a novel need follow a stereotyped pattern, but it is, I think, easier, when doing drama, to try different ways of engaging the pupils' interest and thus possibly arousing a more lively response. A dramatic reading in the classroom (live or tape-recorded) by teacher and pupils involves both in a co-operative effort which can be as stimulating and rewarding for the teacher as the pupils and this directly shared imaginative experience, which both pupils and teacher have created, is one which is to be had only from drama. If the

reading can be conducted, live, in a drama studio, then the experience will be even more enjoyable. A play can also be presented, either initially or after study, by a sound recording and the extra demands which this method makes on the pupils' listening powers makes this form of presentation particularly valuable. Video-tape recorders, which surely must become increasingly available in school, make television drama more readily available to the teacher and, with the provision of a video-camera and playback facilities, pupils will soon be able to enjoy viewing their own performance.

More important than all of these ways of enjoying the experience of drama is, of course, being present at a live performance. Surely one of the most important reasons for teaching drama is the hope that, when they leave school, at least some of the pupils will have become confirmed theatre-goers. Every school which can should certainly take the fullest advantage of the opportunities offered in its own area to give pupils every chance to see as many live performances of plays as possible. In some areas of the country such opportunities have been increased by the establishment of Theatre Workshop companies touring the schools. Even where such opportunities for attending live performances are strictly limited, it is a good idea to encourage selective viewing of television plays, which can be discussed and written about later in the classroom.

In such ways, then, through the teaching of drama and the follow-up visits to the theatre or viewing of television plays, the teacher is directing his pupils towards the worthwhile rather than the trivial, is providing an ever deeper pool of imaginative experience on which they may draw as they mature, and is introducing them to a form of entertainment which some, at least, will pursue for the rest of their lives.

One final reason for teaching drama as literature. For centuries, drama has provided us with some of the greatest masterpieces in literature. These plays require to be read, thought about and discussed as well as seen. Provided the study of drama as literature is approached by teachers who have some knowledge of how the theatre works, then the enjoyment of drama in performance is likely to be greatly enhanced.

THE PROJECT WITH THE SIII NON-CERTIFICATE CLASS

Alastair D. McPhee, English Department, Linwood High School, Johnstone

This project has its origins in a conference which I attended in January, 1971, on the Central Committee bulletin *Projects in Practice*. At this conference I was impressed by the conviction with which the speakers described the various projects they had undertaken. I was also impressed by the way in which projects could be used to unify a fragmented English syllabus and bring all the various activities of the English classroom into clear focus with relation to one another. I was not sure that a narrative or "make-believe" framework as suggested by the various participants in the conference, was an ideal one for today's sophisticated adolescents. However, during the summer term of 1971 I attempted a narrative style project at SI and SIII level.

With the SIII class things did not go as well as I had hoped. The framework was that of a football team in relegation trouble and was taken from *Projects in Practice*, with modifications to suit the individual class. At the end of the project a scrutiny of the master assignment cards revealed that the abler boys in the class had covered fewer assignments than the less able—a reversal of what is normally the case. Discussion with the boys suggested that the majority could not accept the fantastic or make-believe elements in the project. They were, in fact, on a higher level of maturity than I had suspected and considered "making things up" beneath their dignity. Consequently motivation suffered.

The problem, therefore, was to find a framework that, while acting as a unifying force for activities in English, would at the time be more relevant to boys at the SIII stage.

I decided to try again with SIII boys in the